Chapter 4

Vignettes

The following scenarios illustrate the interdisciplinary, systems-thinking, and project-based approach. Although they are presented in elementary, middle, and high school categories, the scenarios can be adapted to other developmental levels through the creativity of the teacher/facilitator.

Elementary School Level

M.A.G.I.C. — Interacting with the Aged

If children do not have the opportunity to become close to their grandparents or other adults, they may develop stereotyped images of the elderly, and, in turn, the elderly may develop stereotyped images of youth. MAGIC (Many Ages—Giving, Interacting, Communicating) brings younger and older people together to share time, concerns, and life experiences. Students in grades three, four, and five visit nursing homes on a regular basis to interact with the elderly. They prepare for their visits with a presentation by the 4-H organization entitled "Walking in my Shoes." Students and nursing home residents participate in arts-and-crafts, musical, and game activities. Upon returning to school, students process the experience with the school counselor, and concerns, joys, and feelings of sadness are shared with each other. Nursing home residents look forward to subsequent visits from their "adopted" grandchildren.

Preparation for this project begins in September with the presentation of "Walking in My Shoes." Nursing home visits begin in October with each visit lasting approximately an hour and a half. Some students are apprehensive about their first nursing home visit and what will be encountered. Discussions about expectations and role-playing activities help students prepare for the experience. Visits by different grade levels continue throughout the school year. Students help plan and implement the events. Students from high school occupational programs may be asked to help younger students prepare for the visits.

An interdisciplinary approach is used. Students create arts-and-crafts gifts to be presented to the elderly during their visual arts class. Musical performances, instrumental and choral, are rehearsed during music classes. Students calculate the cost of the items used to create the arts-and-crafts gift items and develop budgets to get the best value for their dollar. Thank you letters and pen-pal letters are written to nursing home residents, especially when personal relationships are developed through multiple visits. Children learn about experiences, occupations, and recreation from bygone days and compare and contrast these with their own present day experiences.

Students are exposed to various health occupation careers while visiting the nursing home. The exposure may help them identify a career interest. During in-class discussions of what to expect at the nursing home, problems are defined, decisions are made regarding appropriate behavior, and students identify patterns of behavior in elderly people. Positive and negative experiences are shared and possible solutions for future visits are determined. Children work cooperatively with classmates and adults and describe actions that demonstrate respect for the aged. Safety precautions are discussed and practiced to avoid transportation accidents and unsafe situations during nursing home visits.

Students develop a sense of pride and accomplishment in helping and interacting with members of their community. Students also learn the value of service learning and how it promotes their academic achievement in various subjects. Students prepare a written summary of their experience and its positive or negative impact on them.

Community involvement is also emphasized in the project. Local profit and nonprofit businesses donate materials and expertise. For example, the local flower shop donates flowers for the children to create arrangements for the nursing home. Students receive recognition through local newspaper photographs that appear throughout the school year. Students publish information about MAGIC and the nursing home visits in school newsletters that are sent home throughout the school year.

Adapted from MAGIC, developed by Angela Belmont, Service Learning Coordinator, NJ Learn and Serve America.

Young Consumer Program

Imagine your excitement at being 10 years old with the responsibility of spending $100 on a family grocery order for a week. This is the culminating activity of the Young Consumer program. Fourth-grade students shop in pairs, use calculators, make shopping decisions, weigh products, and read store maps. During the event, students are supervised by parents.

On shopping day, students arrive at the store wearing a Young Consumer T-shirt. A parent is assigned to each pair of students. Some parents volunteer to run the problem-solving stations. Students have 90 minutes to complete their tasks, including checking out. Students can earn up to 1000 points for the following: problem solving, purchasing nutritious food, spending close to their allotted $100, adhering to safety standards, and demonstrating map and communication skills.

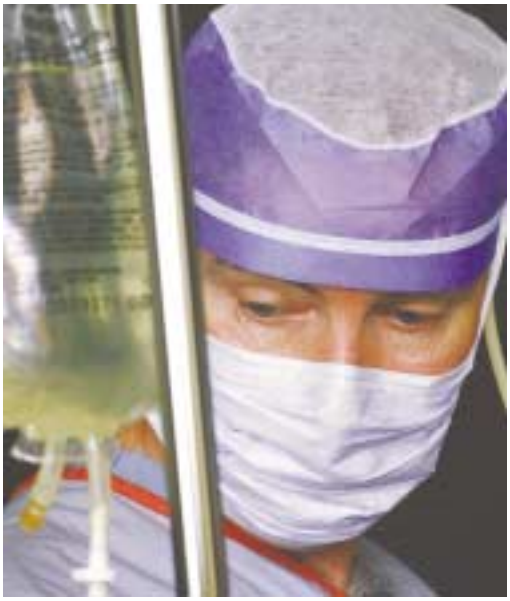
The Young Consumer program focuses on a partnership of school administrators, fourth-grade students, and the students' teacher and parents. In addition, a community supermarket becomes an extension of the classroom. As the program is implemented, a facilitator from the Kelloggs Foundation, working through the Middle Atlantic States Consortium (MAC), guides the partners in fulfilling their respective roles. The school administration approves the Young Consumer concept and provides transportation on the day of the event. The community partner hosts the event and provides information about the food industry and the supermarket for the teacher to infuse in lesson plans. The community partner also attends the parent training session. The teacher develops the lesson plans, organizes the parent training session (parent night), and works with the community partner to set a date for the event. The parents attend the parent night session which prepares them to supervise the students on the event day.

See also the "Promoting Industry Awareness" Best Practice.

Middle School Level

The Real Game

The Real Game, a copyrighted program by Bill Barry and Susan Wright licensed to The Real Game Inc., is a hands-on, practical, experiential learning program that allows students to experience various aspects of the working world through role playing and game devices. The program is cross-curricular and designed for middle and junior high school classes (primarily seventh and eighth grades) of up to 40 students. (Additional versions, designed for students from grade three through adult, are also available.) Through a series of interdisciplinary exercises and events guided by teachers or counselors, students become more aware of the world of work and how their actions in school affect their futures. Anecdotal records from New Jersey teachers indicate that student interest in academics increases as they begin to see the relevance of their studies to life.



Unit One: Learning a Living
In the first unit, Learning a Living, the students are given an overview of the Real Game. The game is presented as a journey in career exploration that will bring the students to "assume the mantle of the expert." The students are informed that they will, through a randomly chosen occupation, explore elements of adult life. To assess current knowledge of terminology and other elements related to the work world, students complete a questionnaire which they fill out again at the end of unit five to evaluate their progress. The students play the first round of the Spin Game which is an interdisciplinary, multiple-choice question-and-answer game and form groups which serve as the basis of many subsequent activities for the Real Game program.

Unit Two: Making a Living
In the second unit, Making a Living, the students take on their roles. Four activities help them to gradually imagine themselves as adult workers.

First, the students explore and express their dreams by choosing items on the "wish list" that they would like to have in their adult life. Reality comes into play when students have to balance their

monthly budgets by applying their mathematical skills and assess what they can actually obtain, taking income and chance, represented by Chance Cards, into consideration. The students personalize their activity poster as they gather information on their neighbors' occupations. Elements on the activity poster include transferable skills, annual holidays, gross and net monthly income, income tax, bills, and expenses.

Unit Three: Quality of Life

In unit three, Quality of Life, the students choose leisure and holiday activities, taking into account the profile assigned to them. They examine their necessary daily activities and then choose activities for their free time. The students plan a group holiday, taking into account their budget and the amount of vacation time allotted to each member. This is an exercise in negotiation. Students research specific destinations and a variety of occupations in the travel industry.

Unit Four: Changes and Choices

The five activities in Changes and Choices help students become aware of unexpected elements that occur in the work world and in life. Unforeseen circumstances change the course of the game as students must offer support and assistance to colleagues who are faced with a job loss. Activities, such as group discussions and essays, help students think of positive actions that may bring new possibilities. Finally, the entire class is rendered jobless by large-scale disasters. The students work as a team, offer solutions, and learn how their transferable skills will enable them to grasp other opportunities.

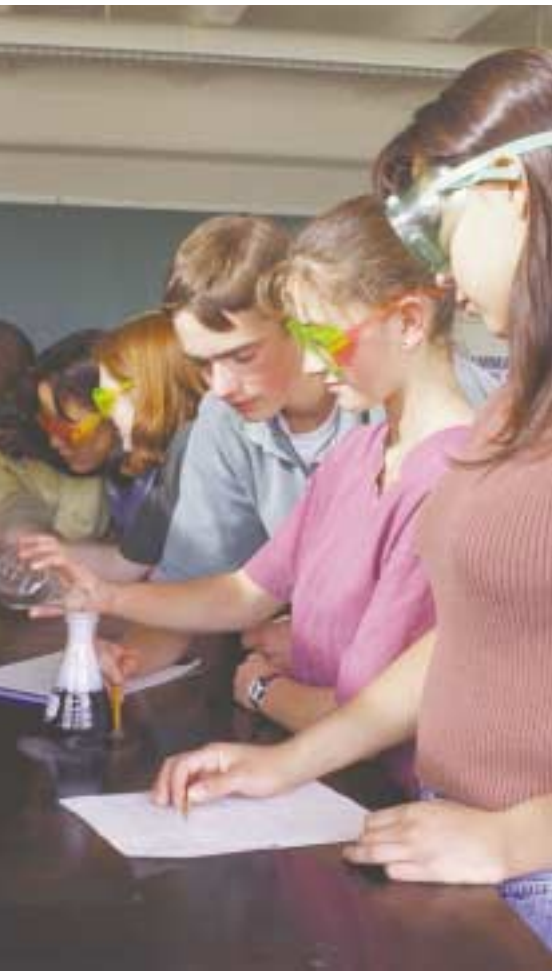
The students then play the second round of the Spin Game so that they may continue to explore occupations, terminology, and the links that exist between their schooling and the work world.

Unit Five: The Personal Journey

The Real Game ends with unit five, The Personal Journey. The students imagine themselves in the future and must reflect on their career journey by talking with individuals in the community. Guest speakers are invited to a career day. These activities enable the students to share their experiences and new knowledge and to gather information on the present work world and a variety of careers.

High School Level

The Corporation Learning Way



The Corporation Learning Way (CLW), developed and copyrighted by John O'Hara, a teacher at Kearny High School, is a pedagogy that incorporates workplace readiness into the core curriculum. Corporation Physics is a high school physics course that uses the Corporation Learning pedagogy. Other disciplines using the Corporation Learning Way include, but are not limited to, English, earth science and social studies.

Using the Corporation Learning Way, students are empowered to take responsibility and leadership roles. Students are taught how to work in teams. They learn to use technology in making presentations. They learn how to stand in front of an audience to deliver a lesson without typical teenage jargon. CLW is a student-centered process that gives students the workplace readiness skills that they will need to enter the workforce of the 21st century upon completing their formal education. It is a process that teaches students how to be life-long learners and provides them with entry-level tools that are essential in business, for example, using technology to communicate ideas and time-management skills.

CLW is a process that is modeled after successful business practices, including teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving, self-management, responsibility, and empowerment. In addition to learning the traditional 3 R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic, students learn the 3 R's of the 21st-century: rigor, responsibility, and relevance.

In Corporation Learning Way, the classroom becomes a corporation, the students become the employees or associates of the firm, and the teacher becomes the CEO. Students write a resumé and a cover letter to apply for a specific team. They list their unique qualifications for the team and provide an alternate team choice. In this manner, students are discouraged from joining their friends' teams, and they can avoid peer pressure to do so by citing their qualifications and background.

Procedures

Imagine a science class with a 14-period, two-week schedule. In a traditional class, the instructor might lecture for five periods during the week and have a double-period lab. In CLW, the instructor presents for the first four periods. The fifth period is a planning period. From period 6 through 12, the students are presenting.

The core curriculum content material is taught at a rigorous, rapid pace by the instructor. After the teacher's presentation, which is an introduction to the material, specialized teams embellish it. Because physics has many components, such as theory, mathematics, laboratory investigations, and use of technology, students apply to be on teams that focus on these areas. They are taught how to prepare a cover letter and a resumé and identify their qualifications for a particular team. Each team is responsible for presenting a specific component of physics to the class approximately once every two weeks. These groups, known as the Quality Team, the Quantity Team, the Lab Team and the WITS (Web, Information, Technology and Speakers Bureau) Team, are a few of the teams used in Corporation Physics.

While students make use of the Internet for research and gathering real-time data, they are not allowed to simply read their notes. They must prepare a computer presentation (e.g., Microsoft® PowerPoint), and they may refer to their notes on a large-screen television connected to the computer. A rubric is used to grade each presentation.

Each team must make an electronic presentation. They must distribute notes of their slides to each student in class. They must also make up a worksheet or some other class activity. The presenting team will grade the activity and record the grades. With seven teams presenting, this provides seven rigorous homework assignments in a two-week period. Students must also publish a company newsletter, design and publish a web page, and be ambassadors for the Corporation Learning process by giving lectures and presentations to the community and school districts.

Three Blind Mice

Three Blind Mice, a program developed at River Dell Regional High School, integrates technological design with language arts literacy and many other areas of the curriculum. Students in grades 9-12 are challenged with the problem of designing and building a mousetrap to successfully capture a live mouse or mice without killing or harming them in any way. The teacher or students select an independent or collaborative approach. First, students gather information about mice to learn their habits, physical attributes, and unique features, electronically and through their library sources. They are given specific design criteria. Although mousetraps are often made of simple materials like cardboard, oaktag and tape, and wood and plastic, students frequently show ingenuity in suggesting unusual materials.

Throughout this technological design process, an English teacher, acting as a language consultant, introduces the students to various selections of poetry and short fiction that involve mice. In some instances, the authors and poets use mice as metaphors which initiates meaningful philosophical discussion. Students analyze and interpret the literary works and express and formulate their own opinions. They make powerful connections between the symbolism and ideas that lie within the poetry and their own real-life situations.

The project culminates on test day. Five live mice arrive on the scene and are placed on a specially constructed barricaded tabletop, along with the student- designed mousetraps. When the mice are released, they scurry for the corners as the students cheer for them to come toward their traps. The students begin to whisper to one another: "My trap is on the wrong side of the table. Uh, oh, I should have designed the ramp differently and placed the door on the other side! Next time..." One scenario might be as one bold mouse cautiously mounts the bread-crumb-covered ramp, all eyes focus on his movements. The creature continues to creep, sniffing and nibbling his way to the top of the ramp, where a Cheese Combo awaits on top of a trapdoor. The mouse moves forward and stands on the trapdoor.

The students stare attentively, astonished that the mouse does not fall, as the feast continues. Then, in one split second, the mouse dashes down the ramp and onto the safety of the table. "The trap door didn't release," moan the owners, already considering how they can improve the design. This culminating test continues all period as many mice escape, making the few that are captured a true prize. Although the period ends, no one wants to leave even to eat lunch.

In Three Blind Mice, students are given the opportunity to solve a genuine problem, starting with research and culminating in thoughtful assessment and revision. This provides experience in brainstorming, planning, designing, making, testing, and evaluating an original product as part of a technological design process. The creative use of language through poetry and fiction allows students to analyze, experience, and apply language to meaningful situations; express formulated opinions; and gain an appreciation and understanding of the power of language. As problems in design construction develop, students interact freely with each other, using critical thinking and discussion skills as they help solve each emergent problem. As a final language arts exercise, the students create and present their own poems or short stories about mice. In producing an original solution to a genuine problem, students find new meaning in the old saying, "Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door."

Adapted from River Dell Regional High School.

Structured Learning Experience

A 17-year old senior wants to be given the opportunity to work for pay in a local business as part of the school curriculum. The student knows of a position that is open at a local deli. The school personnel begin to assist the student.

They identify the student's interest areas for employment based on academic preparation, past job-shadowing experiences, past employment experiences, and volunteer experiences. A review of the student's portfolio and a reassessment of previous activities help determine the career focus and determine whether the local deli position is a viable option. If the student's career interest area is not working in food service, the student should be directed to an employment opportunity more closely related to his/her long-term educational and employment interests.

The cooperative education teacher contacts potential employers for the student or the student obtains a promise of employment and notifies the teacher. The teacher inspects the site, if the district has not yet done so. The teacher assists the student with the employment application process, including interviews and paperwork. Once a promise of employment has been obtained, any student/youth under the age of 18 must obtain an employment certificate, commonly called working papers. The student's proposed hours and days of work must be identified on the employment certificate, along with the student's job title and job description. The school principal signs the employment certificate, certifying the age of the student and verifying that the hours of work will not impair the student's school performance or disrupt the student's class schedule. In addition, the district must ensure that the student's work schedule does not violate state or federal child labor laws. The student, parent/guardian, and a physician, who verifies that the student is physically fit for employment, also sign the employment certificate. Once the employment certificate is completed, the student's work site is then registered on the New Jersey Department of Education's electronic work site registration system as required by the Administrative Code for Standards and Assessment for Student Achievement. (Visit the following web site to view the document: http://www.state.nj.us/njded/adopted/standards/index.html).

School personnel work with the student to develop the formal structured learning contract. The contract specifies the progressively higher-order skills to be achieved by the learner. The agreement is signed by the student, the parent/guardian, and school personnel. See the following web site for a sample agreement: http://www.stw.ed.gov/Database/Subject2.cfm?RECNO=562.

General health and safety instruction is necessary for each student. The student receives safety and health training related to the specific position at the work site. The cooperative education teacher maintains written documentation that this student is proficient.

Documentation of insurance is also kept with the student's records. In addition, if a student uses his or her own motor vehicle for transportation to the work site, a copy of his/her motor vehicle insurance should be maintained on file.

The cooperative education teacher provides ongoing support and documents supervision of the learner at the work site for a minimum of 30 minutes every two weeks. The teacher consults the workplace mentor on a regular basis about student conduct and attendance, development of specific occupational skills, and development of general workplace skills. The school teacher/mentor is ultimately responsible for keeping records and ensuring that a grade is issued for credit by the school. The teacher/school needs to verify the number of hours (starting date and completion date) worked and the attainment of the skills identified as part of the learning agreement.

Food Industry Internship Program

Using the Cornell Distance Education Program (DEP), students can participate in the food industry intern program on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The intern completes the work-experience portion of the program at his/her sponsoring retail store. On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons they participate in food-industry-related coursework at their high school. The intern's in-store work experience is scheduled to coincide with the coursework. For example, interns taking the Grocery Management and Operations course, a component of the program, should spend their in-store time working in the grocery department.

The intern meets with the in-store supervisor to decide on the number of additional hours per week, making sure that it doesn't exceed state regulations and does not affect academic performance.

The intern performs the jobs the sponsoring company assigns her/him to do as permitted by law for minors. The intern is involved in a management responsibility each week. This training activity helps the intern gain an understanding of management goal-setting and how each job responsibility, if done well, contributes to the success of the total retail operation. Some of these responsibilities include:

- weekly scheduling,
- planning and ordering displays,
- ordering and shelf stocking,
- determining shrink and how it can be reduced.